Gnarly

ISSUE #21

LOTS OF KUSTOM ART AND EVENT COVERAGE

NICOLAS VIOLANTE'S "SHOWSHO" 1978 SHOVELHEAD

BURNIN' LOVE

THE NEAL FAMILY'S UNSTOPPABLE JOURNEY

GNARLY MAGAZINE'S FEATURED MODEL

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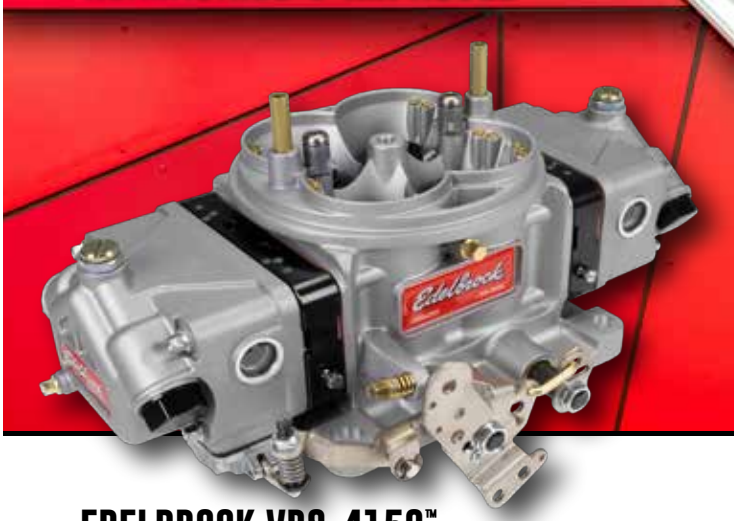

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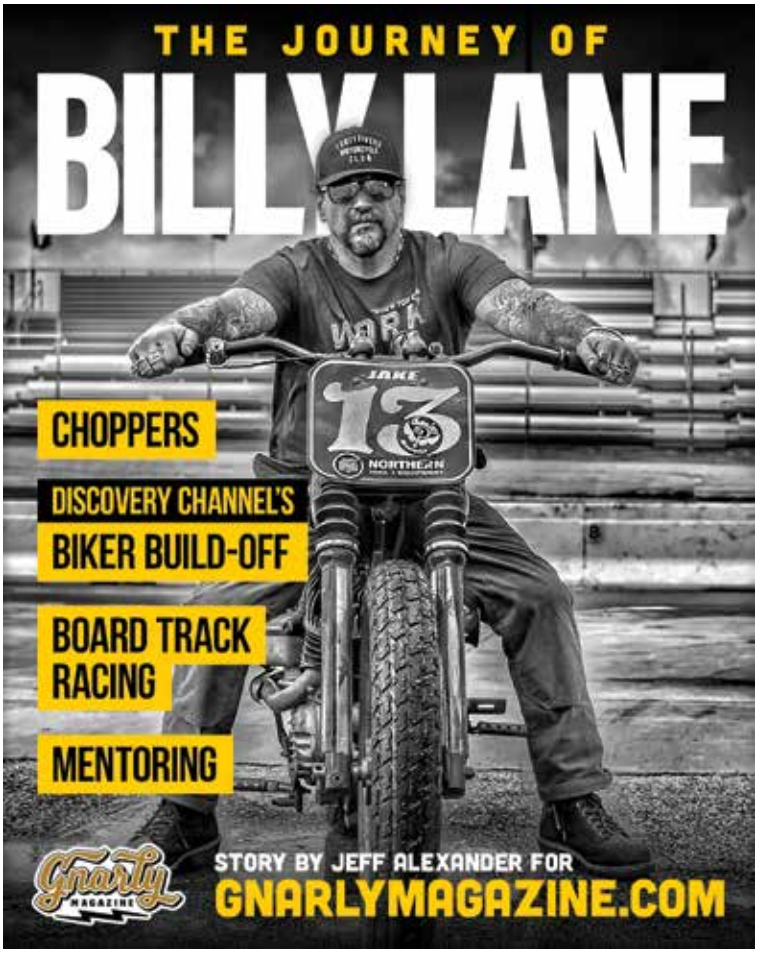
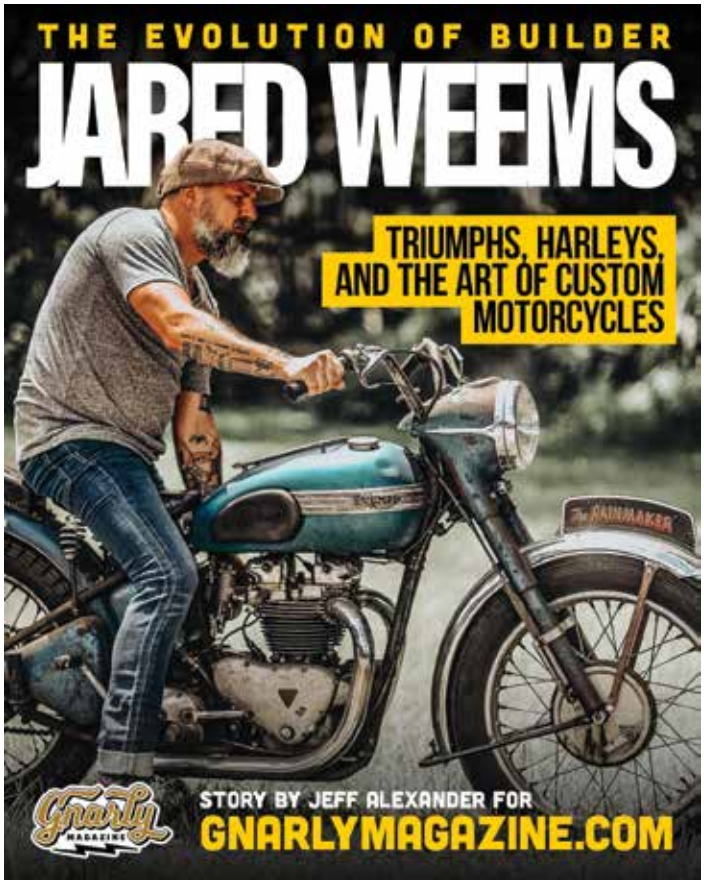
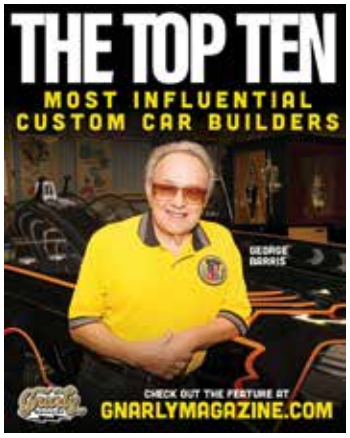
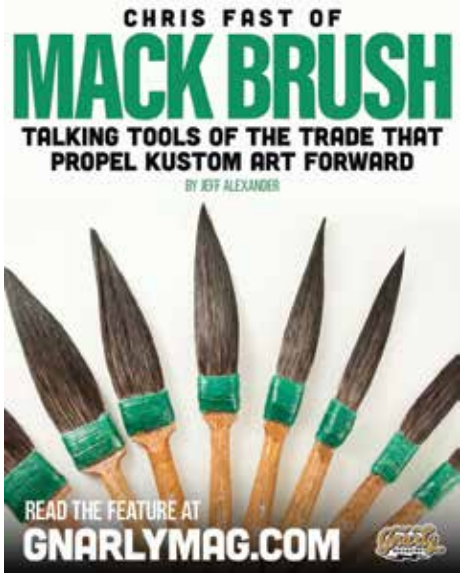






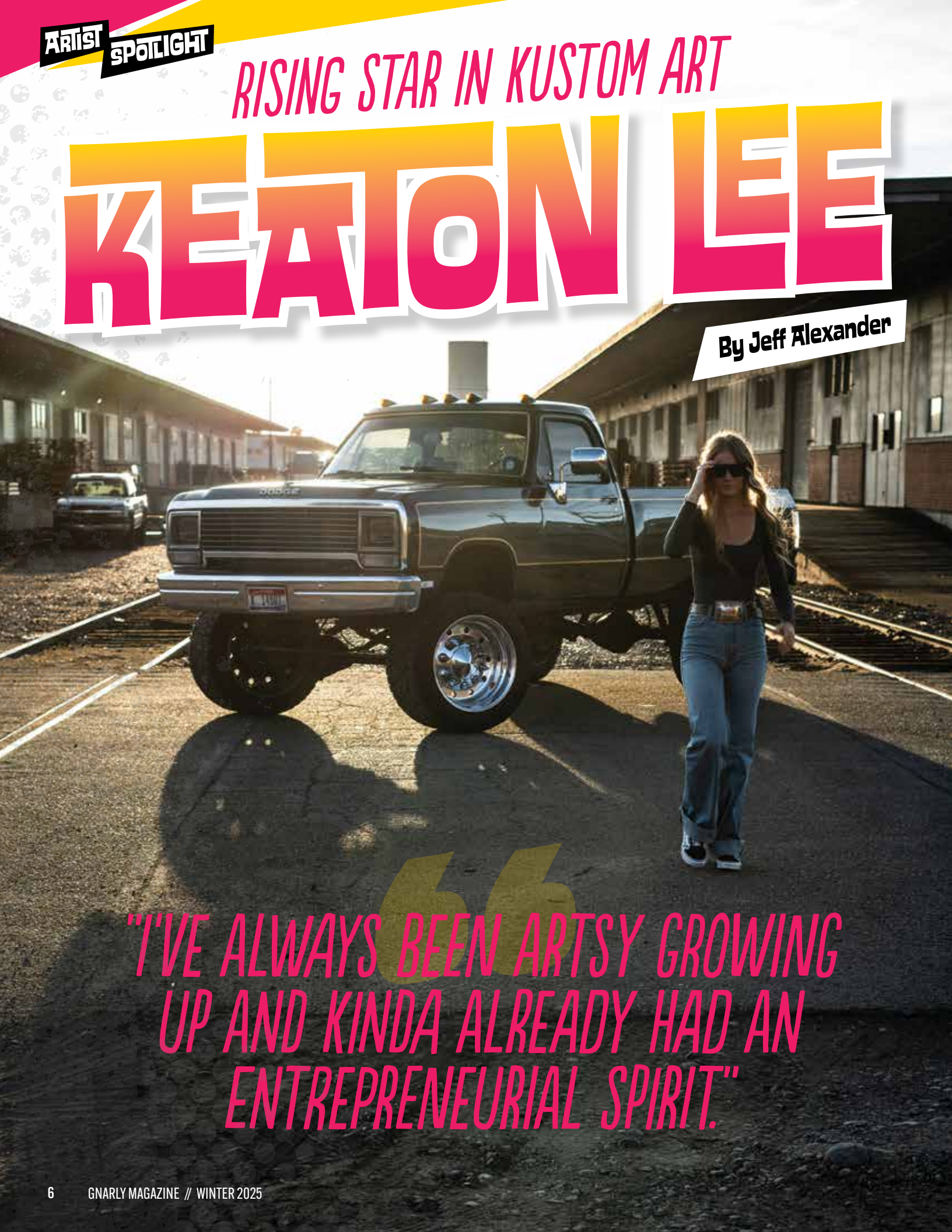


Scan the QR code below to check out these features (and more!) on the Gnarly Magazine website!

RISING STAR IN KUSTOM ART

KEATON LEE

By Jeff Alexander



"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ARTSY GROWING UP AND KINDA ALREADY HAD AN ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT."

Hailing from Idaho, Lee was not always immersed in the kustom subculture but drew inspiration from watching her father wrenching and immersing herself within crafting fine arts, she leveraged her tenacity to ultimately launch Crazy K Kustomz. Affirming nothing has come easy, Lee continues seeking mentorship while evolving her kustom painting skills within a competitive landscape.

"I joined my high school's auto tech program in 2022 and my teacher Andy Rogge was very supportive. My dad had an old CJ7 I grew up watching him work on and that inspired me to work my butt off cleaning horse stalls at a local ranch so I could buy my 1987 Chevy square body. I've always been attracted to vintage designs and their unique place in history. My tech program would get kids painting jobs and of course, clients were patient and understanding due to our growing skills and needing the practice," said Lee.

She added, "I feel I have a strong eye for design and would research a lot of art and painters online. After I painted a motorcycle fender using kandy and flake, I was really hooked! Of course, my first attempts resulted in one big glitter bomb in class!"

Lee's entry to the versatile world of kustom kulture was not built upon the foundation of studying iconic artists and designs, but with hours of self-instruction and leveraging social media for mentorship.

"I love how welcoming kustom kulture can be and I know nothing replaces hands-on mentorship but I continue learning so much! I note how many experienced painters are older and me being younger, I feel it's important to be involved in keeping this art form alive because it allows for so much expression. I continue learning about the early, iconic painters but I don't want that to be the sole source of inspiration," said Lee.

Immediately after graduation, Lee made the pivotal choice to begin her own kustom painting business and launched Crazy K Kustomz. She sought guidance from her family and employed an accountant to ensure she would not neglect the business side of things that many artists sadly overlook.

"I knew launching my own business could be a risk but I really wanted to go for it! I worked my butt off and I knew that I could attract clients by showing my dedication. I think it's important to creatively, not stay stuck in just one style, and working to master many techniques allows for more growth. I was getting clients from word-of-mouth and using social media definitely helps get more eyes on my work," said Lee.

Lee earned more eyes on her work for customizing the designs of classic, mid-century refrigerators. Uniting mid-century design with her bold, yet tasteful kustom kulture flair, Lee's completed fridges remain in demand.

"I enjoy doing those and hunt for them on Facebook Marketplace. The owner

of a local paint store, his son and I have gone in together on buying them. I always try to make sure they run because fixing them can be expensive and a pain. I wanna bring lowrider culture and design into them and I'm so happy people online love them! I'm working on another one as we speak," shared Lee.

Despite being so new to the subculture, Lee has already created challenging expectations for her creativity. Seeking to avoid the pitfalls of repetition, Lee stated she understands the careful balance of paying homage to iconic designs while propelling one's personal style forward.

"That will always be a challenge but I want to actively avoid repetition. I feel a new artist will look at classic styles and just try to create that, which might not help them grow. My newest ideas celebrate lowrider paint designs and I used that style for the fridges but I want to make sure I don't always stay focused on one particular style because versatility is so important," stated Lee.

Lee is currently working on expanding her eye for design into motorcycles, working on creating her own signature lines and style within a crowded business landscape.

"I've always been attracted to classic chopper styles and hope to go all in with that. I've been getting jobs and recently finished a project for a Harley dealership. My family has been very supportive with the business but they're not too crazy about me riding," laughed Lee.

She recently scored her iron head

chopper by working out a barter deal; her custom paint work for a discount off the '74. Lee immediately shared she is well aware of the challenges of having a vintage chopper for her first bike, but her passion defied logic.

"Because it's raked it's certainly not the easiest to ride but I do love it! I know iron heads can be troublesome, hell, my coil packs exploded last week but at least it was outside and didn't cause a mess! It's kick-only and right-side shift so that was also a learning curve. It has show quality chrome and the original owner rebuilt the motor. Sure, there's always more you can do with it but I love it for what it is, a cool '74 chopper," shared Lee.

As a new business owner, Lee continues speaking with a sense of confidence reminiscent of a proven veteran. Her self-awareness ensures a clear sense of responsibility while her tenacity continues propelling her forward, even if she may feel isolated at times.

"I know I have to want it, every day. It's not simply showing up every day, it's showing up with the drive for all aspects of it. I know if things are slow with clients I have to create my own projects, like doing the fridge painting. I can feel a little isolated because I know I don't have the common interests and passions as other people my age but I have a strong support system with good friends," said Lee.

Asked if she fears she may 'peak early' due to beginning her business so early in adulthood, Lee took a moment to reflect.

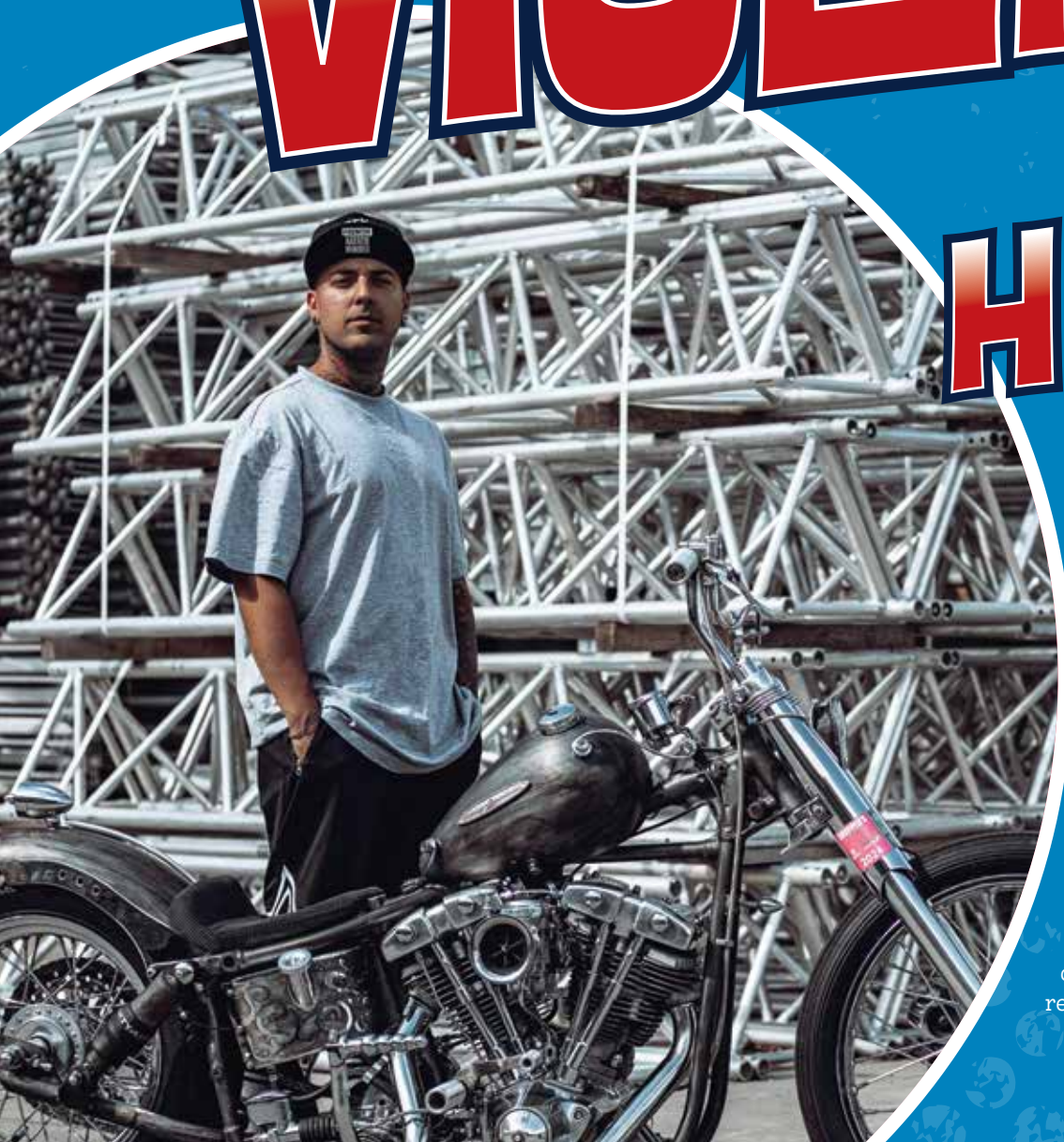
"I would say yes and no because the thought has crossed my mind but I strongly feel I can only get better because I am not focused on growing and learning just one thing. I hope to create and host my own painting classes for young people to expose them to the basics of this great art world while sharing knowledge. Nothing is easy doing this but I am proud to share I have the daily drive for it all," concluded Lee.

KUSTOM KULTURE'S REACH HAS ENABLED INTERNATIONAL UNITY AND THE UNPRECEDENTED ABILITY TO POOL RESOURCES AND GAIN AN INTIMATE GLIMPSE BEHIND THE PROCESS OF BUILDERS AND ARTISTS THAT CONTINUE ELEVATING THE SUBCULTURE.

VIVE LE KUSTOM KULTURE!

NICOLAS VIOLANTE

By Jeff Alexander



Hailing from France, Nicolas Violante has leveraged social media's connectivity and print media to source inspiration, ultimately building a kustom shovelhead that continues reinforcing his conviction that despite limited experience passion and tenacity can bring goals to fruition.

"I would read Streetfighter Magazine and enjoy seeing motorcycles with very wide handlebars and raised rear frames, a style that comes from Germany. I modified my first bike, a Triumph Street Triple like that. It wasn't my first kustom build but it was my first modification. I have a friend that drives a 1962 Chevy C10 pickup with air ride suspension and that was my first contact with kustom kulture," reflected Violante.

NICOLAS VIOLANTE

"IDEAS ARE EASY BUT REALIZING THEM IS MORE DIFFICULT. I WANTED SOMETHING THAT LOOKED LIKE A SHOW BIKE BUT NOT REALLY A SHOW BIKE."

Violante traces his love for motorcycles to his big brother, whom owned several motorcycles over the years. The unlimited ability to personalize rides and the freedom they offered continued to draw Violante into moto culture.

"It was all very impressive to me! Bikes that I went on to own, I would always think what could be done to modify them; aftermarket parts, personal painting or how to make it more aggressive and cooler looking. Harley is my favorite brand and there are a lot of parts available, big bore kits or complete engines. It's fantastic," shared Violante.

Violante sought to undertake a greater challenge for himself; transforming a vintage shovelhead. With no local

kustom kulture community to lean on for guidance and support, he sought the knowledge of his friend who worked as a mechanic, but nothing proved easy.

"Ideas are easy but realizing them is more difficult. I wanted something that looked like a show bike but not really a show bike. It was very difficult building parts and to adapt parts from another motorcycle. Everything is possible but it's not easy and I took a lot of vacation from my job to build it in my friend's workshop. It was tough and my wife took care of our twins alone and I was sometimes in the workshop at night. I loved those moments in the workshop, with the tools, and the motorcycles. It really is my passion," said Violante.

Violante stated France has no notable kustom kulture community due to continued stringent laws limiting how vehicles are modified. European Association of Motorcycle Manufacturers (ACEM) has reevaluated its guidelines to impose stricter regulations on removable baffles and aftermarket motorcycle exhausts, hindering kustom builders and perhaps forcing some to abandon all design plans.

"To put it simply, there is no kustom kulture community in France and it's sad. There are meetups with old American cars, some modified motorcycles but it's very hard to drive a modified vehicle because of strict laws. I take my design inspiration from Arlen Ness and I really like the work of his grandson, Zack. My friend is less known but has made some nice motorcycles and one with a sidecar and has won prizes. He influenced me, for sure, and did everything in his workshop, Magic American Garage," shared Violante.

Asked if he sees the already limited kustom kulture community whittling away due to continued legislation, Violante proudly stated "Nothing will prevent young people from being attracted to motorcycles but on the

"TO PUT IT SIMPLY, THERE IS NO KUSTOM KULTURE COMMUNITY IN FRANCE AND IT'S SAD. THERE ARE MEETUPS WITH OLD AMERICAN CARS, SOME MODIFIED MOTORCYCLES BUT IT'S VERY HARD TO DRIVE A MODIFIED VEHICLE BECAUSE OF STRICT LAWS."

NICOLAS VIOLANTE

other hand, kustom kulture here is more complicated. I do see young people on modified mopeds but that is still far from very developed. My 6-year-old twins ride small motocross bikes and we tinker a little, I try to give them a taste for it." said Violante.

Legislation may continue to be more imposing, but Violante remains undeterred and committed to continue his passion for kustom kulture.

"I am interested in doing another show bike, something with a very low, rigid frame and large 26 inch wheels. Kustom kulture is extremely rare in France and I keep looking at social networks in the U.S., where we see hot rods, dragsters, and muscle cars on the roads. This is one of the reasons why I love the USA. In France, you would never see that, it's impossible because of current laws. European standards are killing kustom kulture, which is already rare," lamented Violante.

We look forward to checking out Violante's next build and publicizing his efforts to keep kustom kulture alive within his community.

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NICOLAS VIOLANTE

BURNIN' LOVE

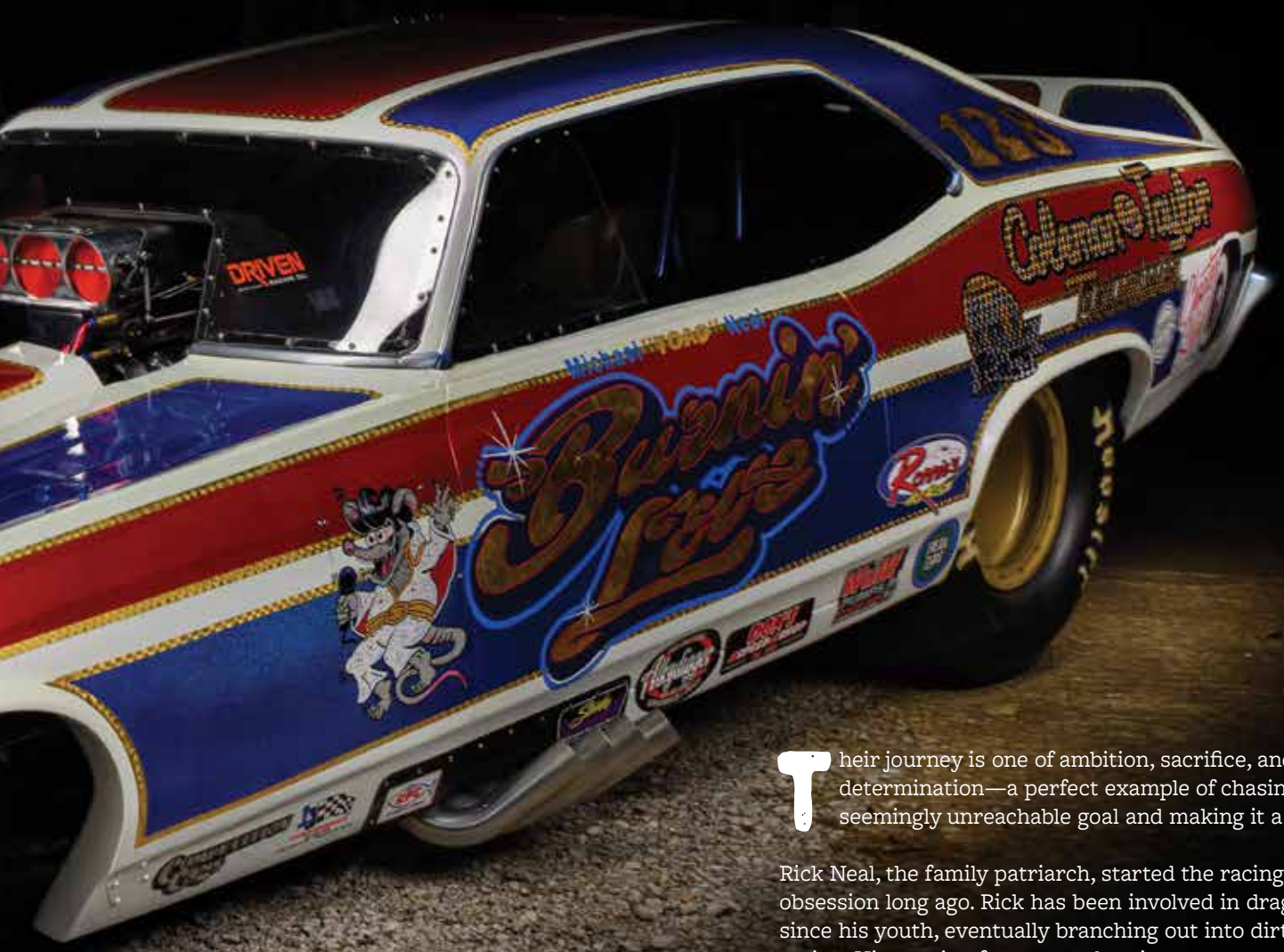
STORY BY CHUCK STANFILL

THE NEAL FAMILY'S UNSTOPPABLE JOURNEY

The story of Rick and Michael Neal, a father-and-son duo from Northern Mississippi, is a testament to perseverance, family values, and an unrelenting love for racing. For over 25 years, the Neals have lived by a favorite quote from Nelson Mandela:

"A WINNER IS JUST A DREAMER WHO NEVER GIVES UP."

While Mandela likely wasn't referring to drag racing, the Neals have wholeheartedly embraced this sentiment, applying it to their lifelong dream of owning and racing a Funny Car.



Their journey is one of ambition, sacrifice, and sheer determination—a perfect example of chasing a seemingly unreachable goal and making it a reality.

Rick Neal, the family patriarch, started the racing obsession long ago. Rick has been involved in drag racing since his youth, eventually branching out into dirt track racing. His passion for cars and racing was passed down to his son, Michael, nicknamed "Toad" after the character from the classic movie American Graffiti. Toad didn't waste any time getting involved in racing either—by the age of nine, he was already a BMX champion, and by 14, he was bracket-racing a Chevy S-10 pickup with Rick serving as crew chief. Together, the two formed a racing team built on hard work, skill, and a shared dream.

BURNIN' LOVE

That dream began to take shape when a flip-top ’78 Trans Am, painted in full Smokey and the Bandit livery, rolled into their local track. It sparked a conversation between Rick and Michael:

"WOULDN'T IT BE COOL TO HAVE A FUNNY CAR LIKE THAT?"

Though it was well beyond their means at the time, the seed was planted. Over the years, they moved through a series of increasingly serious racing vehicles, starting with selling the S-10 for a Fiat-bodied Altered roller. The Fiat was a thrill to drive, especially with its copper metallic paint job and a big-block Chevy engine, but it wasn’t ideal for bracket racing. The car’s unpredictable handling forced the Neals to explore other options.

Eventually, they upgraded to a blown ’48 Anglia, which they named “Dixie Fever.” Rick painted the car in a striking metallic candy red with stars and stripes, a nod to their earlier S-10. Dixie Fever became a well-known name in Nostalgia racing circles, especially after appearing at the prestigious Meltdown Drags. Despite their success, the desire to own a Funny Car never disappeared, and when they began running as a support class for the Funny Car Chaos series, that old dream started to seem more achievable.

The pivotal moment came when Michael became interested in a BBC-powered ’70 Nova-bodied Funny Car owned by Jordan Ballew. The Nova had sentimental value to Michael, as he had driven one in high school and even dated his wife Chelsea in it. Unfortunately, the car was initially out of their budget, but Michael kept an eye on it as it changed hands several times. Each time, the price dropped, bringing the Neals closer to their goal.

Realizing they needed to make a dramatic move to fulfill their Funny Car dream, the Neals made the tough decision to sell Dixie Fever. It wasn’t easy, as Dixie Fever had been a staple in their racing efforts, but they were willing to take the risk. As fate would have it, the Nova came back up for sale, this time without an engine, making it affordable for the Neals. Within weeks they struck a deal for the Nova, which now felt like destiny.

After a year of collecting parts and preparing, the real work began in January of 2023. Rick and Michael teamed up with lifelong friends and fellow racers Ronnie and Casey Geeslin, and together, they embarked on

TOAD

HOT ROD ART
ometimes She Do... Sometimes She Don't
ACCEL
REMOVE

BURNIN' LOVE

Michael "TOAD" Neal
Burnin' Love
Ronnie's
FREAK FLAKE
Wulff PUMPS
DON'S SPEED SHOP
Alkydigger
Stroke
RFC

MISSISSIPPI MAFIA

the massive project of building the Funny Car. The Geeslins, who had just acquired their own flopper, became an integral part of the process, helping with assembly at Ronnie's Hot Rods in Senatobia, Mississippi. Meanwhile, Rick transformed the Nova's body in his paint booth, creating a stunning throwback to Michael's high-school car, which they named...

BURNIN' LOVE.

The car's paint job was a true labor of love and attention to detail. Rick started with a white base coat, layering it with Lavender Pearl and White Ice Pearl before adding intricate red and blue metal flake panels. The final touch was hand-turned gold leaf for the lettering and borders, plus the cheeky "Pelvis Possum" mascot on the side—a nod to their proximity to Memphis and the Rat Fink art style. After multiple layers of clear coat, the result is a visually breathtaking Funny Car that turns heads even before it hits the track.

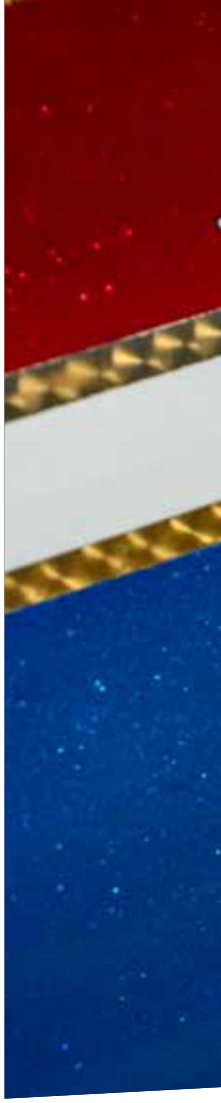
The Neals debuted Burnin' Love at the Funny Car Chaos series opener in Texas, only three weeks after completing the build. Despite limited testing, they quickly adapted to the new setup and managed a clean pass at 4.74 in the eighth mile during qualifying. Although they just missed out on making the 32-car field, the weekend was a resounding success. Burnin' Love was voted Best Appearing Car, and the Neals had proven that they were serious contenders in the world of Funny Car racing.

Their rookie season was more than they could have hoped for. Backed by sponsorships from Coleman-Taylor Transmissions and with support from family and friends, they raced at nearly every event, finishing 14th in points out of 91 Funny Cars for the 2023 season. With new goals for 2024, including a top-ten finish and exciting upgrades like a new supercharger from Alky Digger, the Neals are poised for even greater success.

The Neal family entered their second season in the Funny Car Chaos series with high hopes after a successful rookie year. At the season opener in Texas, Michael Neal ran a career-best 4.55 seconds at 163 mph but narrowly missed qualifying, finishing 37th out of 54 cars. Frustrated by timing issues, they headed to Baton Rouge, where more problems plagued their runs, leading to an early exit.

In Odessa, Texas, they qualified but faced event cancellations due to bad weather. Cordova was another low point, with the car failing to accelerate. Desperate for answers, the team made key adjustments, including changing the MSD grid box and upgrading the torque converter.

BURNIN' LOVE



The changes paid off at Albuquerque Dragway, where Michael reached his first Funny Car Chaos final, ultimately losing to Wayne Hofman but celebrating the breakthrough. With renewed momentum, the Neals headed to Mokan Dragway for the championship finals, aiming for a Top 10 finish. Michael reached another final and secured 8th place in the standings, achieving their goal.

As the 2024 season came to a close, the Neals reflected on their incredible journey. From scraping together just enough money to compete in their first race in 2023, they had now completed two full seasons in the Funny Car Chaos series, growing faster and stronger than they could have ever imagined.

For Rick and Michael Neal, the dream that started as a far-off "wouldn't it be cool" conversation is now their reality—proving once again that a winner is, indeed, just a dreamer who never gives up. As they look ahead to the 2025 season, Rick and Michael Neal are more determined than ever. With new sponsors, improved equipment, and the experience of two seasons behind them, they know their racing story is far from over. As Michael put it...

"WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED."

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GNARLY MAGAZINE'S FEATURED MODEL

Lil Darlin

Words by Jeff Alexander // Photos by Charles Henry

Zoe Garibay's discovery of kustom kulture has re-energized her passion for moto culture and modeling. Drawn to classic-styled choppers while attending Born Free, Garibay is working toward creating a new path routed in modeling and art as she continues embracing the chopper subculture.

"It's a different world for me and the community drew me in. I was really taken and inspired by all the builders and artists that basically put their lives into it and I felt that passion," shared Garibay.

Garibay's entry into moto culture started with her father's affinity for classic muscle cars, which ultimately led her to discover the thrilling world of motorcycling.

"I was into motorcycles when I was younger but didn't actively pursue anything until a few years ago. I was apprenticing at a local shop in San Antonio and was really focused on learning. I did tire changes, oil changes and I loved it! Just coming home dirty and bruised was empowering because I know they were reminders that I was working and learning," shared Garibay.

After completing her tenure with the local shop, Garibay concluded that even though she was learning the mechanics of sport bikes, it was classic choppers that really sparked her passion to grow her skills but kustom kulture also sparked another dormant path within her: modeling.

"I began modeling back in high school despite experiencing bullying. I submitted paperwork for local competitions and I was really surprised when I was scouted for Miss Teen Hawaii! Our family was stationed there because my stepdad was in the Air Force. My mom asked me if that was something I really wanted and I decided to just go for it! It was challenging because I was such a tomboy and even though I didn't place, I gained new experiences so I was learning something new," she reflected.

Garibay leveraged her Miss Teen Hawaii experience to pursue additional modeling opportunities, ultimately earning work on the television show Hawaii Five-o. With her newfound confidence, Garibay gained unique insight into television production and began refining her modeling techniques.

"That was certainly an interesting experience! My friend knew the producer and had invited me to an event. I simply took a chance and asked the producer if I could be an extra for an episode and he said yes! All the scene required was for me to lay on the beach, no speaking lines. Not a bad way to earn money.

Afterward, I was invited to join the actors and producer for lunch and Xzibit was there," she laughed.

Garibay continued embracing modeling and earned publication with Suicide Girls, stating this year she will work on creating new opportunities to take a more active role within kustom kulture. Witnessing the subculture's versatility and willingness to embrace diverse supporters sparked Garibay to begin planning how she could transition to a creator.

"I plan on attending school for auto collision, to learn that as the foundation for kustom painting. I paint using acrylics and my themes are mostly Surrealism.

I have been doing that for seven years and that mostly helps me when I feel a burst of inspiration or when I'm restless. I was really inspired by all the metal flake and pinstripe designs I experienced at Born Free and I think doing kustom paint jobs for cars and bikes would be a dream job. I feel there is something for everyone within kustom kulture and motorcycles. There are no limits," concluded Garibay.

MODEL IG: @_LILDARLIN_
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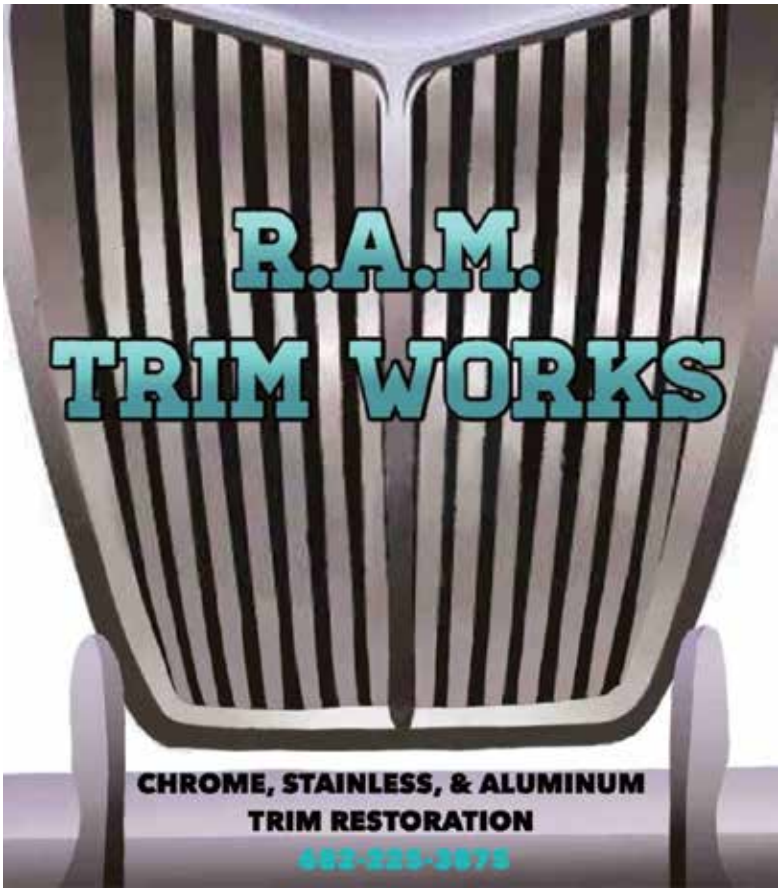
Model: Lil Darlin - IG: @_lildarlin_ / Photo by Charles Henry - IG: @th_pr_genyph_to / GnarlyMagazine.com - IG: @gnarlymagazine

ABOUT THE BIKE

Check out Nicholas Wagner's personal ripper, featured in Lil Darlin's photoshoot for Gnarly Magazine! This beast is a 1947 Harley-Davidson FL Knucklehead motor with an early transmission, both built by Nicholas. This bike also sports an original bullneck frame, and all-original springer front end. Nicholas' favorite detail? The rare early '36 cam cover. Built for long hauls, this bike is a true freight train. The flame tank paint was done by the talented Mitch Bailey—give him a follow on Instagram @mitch_bailey. For more shots of this incredible build, head over to Nicholas' page: @wagnikner.



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FROM HIGH SCHOOL DENIM TO ICONIC JEAN JACKETS:

THE STORY OF ERIC KARALIS

AIRBRUSH ARTIST AND METALHEAD

In a world increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence and digital production, some artists stand tall, rooted in the traditions of handcrafted creativity. Eric Karalis is one of those rare individuals. A hardcore artist, painter, and metalhead, Eric's journey began in Lindenhurst, NY, where a seemingly unremarkable denim vest catapulted him into the art world. Today, his work embodies what he proudly calls "old-school cool"—a movement to keep handmade art alive in a time of AI and digital production.

THE ORIGIN STORY: A DENIM VEST THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

Eric's artistic journey started during his high school years in 1983. It was in his cousin Billy's bedroom that he painted his first denim vest, a tribute to Randy Rhoads and OZZY Osbourne. What seemed like just another piece of teenage rebellion caught the eye of his art teacher, Mr. Nicholas Baldo, affectionately known as "The Owl Prince." Mr. Baldo interrupted one of Eric's English classes, insisting that he enroll in art class the following year. That decision changed Eric's life forever. By the spring of 1984, he had not only developed a love for art but also earned a full scholarship to Molloy College, thanks to Mr. Baldo's encouragement.

Though his path was unconventional, Eric found his way. Despite not taking computer graphics in the 1980s, a choice he might reconsider today, he still thrived in the creative world. However, like many artists, he faced struggles. After supporting himself through art throughout college, life took a different turn.

Eric Karalis with his "Eddie" art, which won Gnarly Magazine's Hand Painted Woodcut Art Contest

THE 18-YEAR HIATUS: "YOU NEED A REAL JOB"

By the time he hit 36, Eric, like many, fell victim to the pressures of the "real job" narrative. For 18 years, he stepped away from his art, working as a production manager, graphic designer, and even running his own businesses in the restaurant and display industries. His client list included names like Coca-Cola, Anheuser-Busch, and PepsiCo. It wasn't until COVID-19 hit in 2020, devastating his business, that Eric returned to his roots.

Rediscovering his passion for art, Eric picked up his airbrush and paintbrush again, creating denim jackets and woodcut artworks under the alias "EddieHeads." Instagram became his platform of choice, where he introduced himself in July 2020. In just a few short years, Eric has not only rekindled his love for art but has built a supportive global community of fans and clients.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE RISE OF "OLD-SCHOOL COOL"

Eric's following has exploded, with social media playing a vital role in promoting his one-of-a-kind artwork. His clientele now stretches across the United States and beyond, and he describes them fondly as his "Happy Friends." Whether it's denim jackets adorned with heavy metal icons like Iron Maiden or Metallica, or his meticulously crafted woodcut art, Eric's work evokes awe in those who see it.

"HAVING A BOSS IS HIGHLY OVERRATED"

One of his viral moments came with the creation of a Metallica "Ride the Lightning" denim jacket. This piece opened the floodgates for commissions, allowing Eric to be selective with his work. As for his artistic motivation? It's simple: "I'm living the dream I had in my head forever," he says.

FROM METAL TO BATMAN: THE ART THAT LEAVES A MARK

When asked about his favorite project, Eric points to his Batman & Spawn jacket—a commission for a close friend. The project was not only a technical challenge but also a personal labor of love. "Seeing someone see what I have painted for the first time tells me everything I need to know," says Eric. "You can't hide happiness, and that's my goal."

Each jacket he paints is a unique masterpiece. Whether it takes hours or weeks, Eric invests everything into making sure the piece screams "WOW!" when the recipient sees it. His dedication is evident in the meticulous planning that goes into every piece. He reverse-engineers each project to make sure the techniques he uses bring out the best in the artwork without compromising on quality.

A NOD FROM THE LEGENDS: IRON MAIDEN'S RADAR

Though he hasn't received direct feedback from Iron Maiden or Metallica just yet, Eric's work hasn't gone unnoticed. Fans of his jackets have told him that members of Iron Maiden have seen and even autographed his work. He's also set to have dinner with Iron Maiden's iconic artist Derek Riggs, a milestone he's eagerly looking forward to.

LOOKING AHEAD: SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND ARTISTIC FREEDOM

Despite the challenges he's faced, Eric wouldn't change a thing. After years of working for others, he's embraced self-employment. Today, he juggles everything from digital work to painting commissions, thriving in the creative freedom he's built for himself. "Having a boss is highly overrated," he jokes. And with a growing fanbase and a steady stream of commissions, Eric shows no signs of slowing down.

For Eric Karalis, the future is about staying true to his roots—continuing to create art that moves people, while keeping the spirit of old-school craftsmanship alive.

Whether it's denim jackets or airbrushed wall art, Eric Karalis is living proof that hand-crafted art will never go out of style. In a world of AI and digital convenience, artists like him are keeping the flame of tradition alive, one brushstroke at a time.

INSTAGRAM:
@ERICKARALIS
@EDDIEHEADS

FACEBOOK:
ERICKARALIS1

LOWBROW CHRONICLES: UNVEILING THE ARTISTRY OF UNKIE FRESH

IN THE QUAINT TOWN OF MOORESVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA, AMIDST THE SERENITY OF SUBURBAN LIFE, THRIVES AN ARTIST WHOSE IMAGINATION KNOWS NO BOUNDS.

Jonathan McElfresh, fondly known as Unkie Fresh, is a name synonymous with vibrant illustrations, captivating paintings, and a burgeoning career in the world of tattoo artistry. With an eclectic style that blends lowbrow aesthetics with a dash of grime and a pinch of cartoonish charm, Unkie Fresh has carved out a niche for himself in the bustling realm of contemporary art.

Unkie Fresh's artistic journey began long before his current acclaim. "I've drawn all my life, but it's been a hobby for me for the past 15 or so years," he shares, reflecting on his early passion for creativity. Yet, it wasn't until recently that his talents truly began to bloom, catching the attention of enthusiasts and connoisseurs alike.

CENTRAL TO UNKIE FRESH'S ARTISTIC EVOLUTION IS HIS VENTURE INTO THE REALM OF TATTOO ARTISTRY.

Under the mentorship of Kelsea McCree at Family Tradition Tattoo, he delves into the intricate world of tattooing, navigating the fine balance between tradition and innovation. "Tattooing is like drawing on water," he muses, emphasizing the unique challenges and rewards of this dynamic medium.

While tattooing occupies a significant portion of his time, Unkie Fresh's artistic repertoire extends far beyond the realm of skin. From woodcuts to digital illustrations, each creation bears his unmistakable signature style—a fusion of whimsically weird, irreverence, and boundless creativity. "I guess I'd call it a lowbrow Grime cartoon," he remarks, offering a glimpse into the colorful tapestry of his imagination.

Balancing his burgeoning tattoo career with other artistic pursuits, Unkie Fresh's typical day is a whirlwind of activity. "Four days of the week are 100% dedicated to my tattoo apprenticeship and homework projects," he explains, illustrating his unwavering commitment to his craft. Yet, amidst the hustle and bustle, he finds solace in the act of creation, whether it be through pinstriping, digital art, or traditional painting and drawing.

UNKIE FRESH'S ARTISTIC INFLUENCES ARE AS DIVERSE AS THEY ARE ECLECTIC.

"I grew up watching cartoons," he reminisces, citing shows like Ren and Stimpy and Beavis and Butthead as seminal inspirations. Yet, it's not just artistic prowess that he admires in his contemporaries; it's their ability to push boundaries and defy conventions that truly sets them apart.

In the age of social media, Unkie Fresh finds both solace and challenge. While platforms like Instagram offer unparalleled opportunities for exposure and connection, they also bring with them the pressure of validation. "I tend to try not to pay attention too much to the likes and hits," he admits, acknowledging the delicate balance between artistic integrity and commercial success.

Looking ahead, Unkie Fresh remains steadfast in his pursuit of artistic excellence. Whether tattooing in distant locales or crafting lowbrow illustrations from the comfort of his studio, his passion for creativity knows no bounds. "I want to be a traveling artist and tattooer," he shares, envisioning a future filled with endless possibilities and boundless creativity.

As Unkie Fresh continues to captivate audiences with his vibrant creations, one thing remains abundantly clear: his journey is far from over. With each stroke of the brush and every line of ink, he leaves an indelible mark on the world of lowbrow art, proving that true creativity knows no limits.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE:

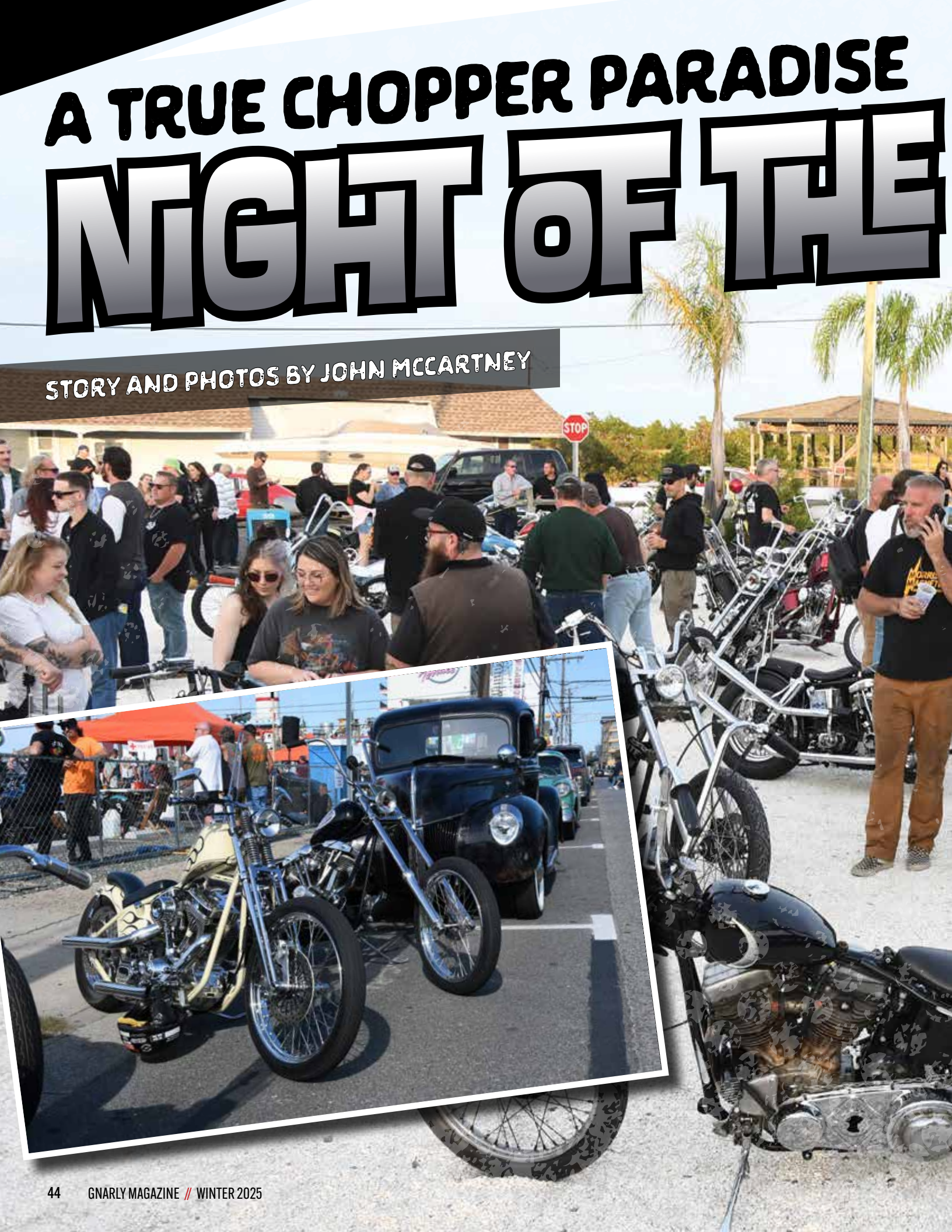
- Alphanamel paints
- Long liner Virus brush from Mack Brush, modified to fit into a 1.5" tattoo machine tube

Follow Unkie Fresh on Instagram **@unkie_fresh**

A TRUE CHOPPER PARADISE

NIGHT OF THE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN MCCARTNEY



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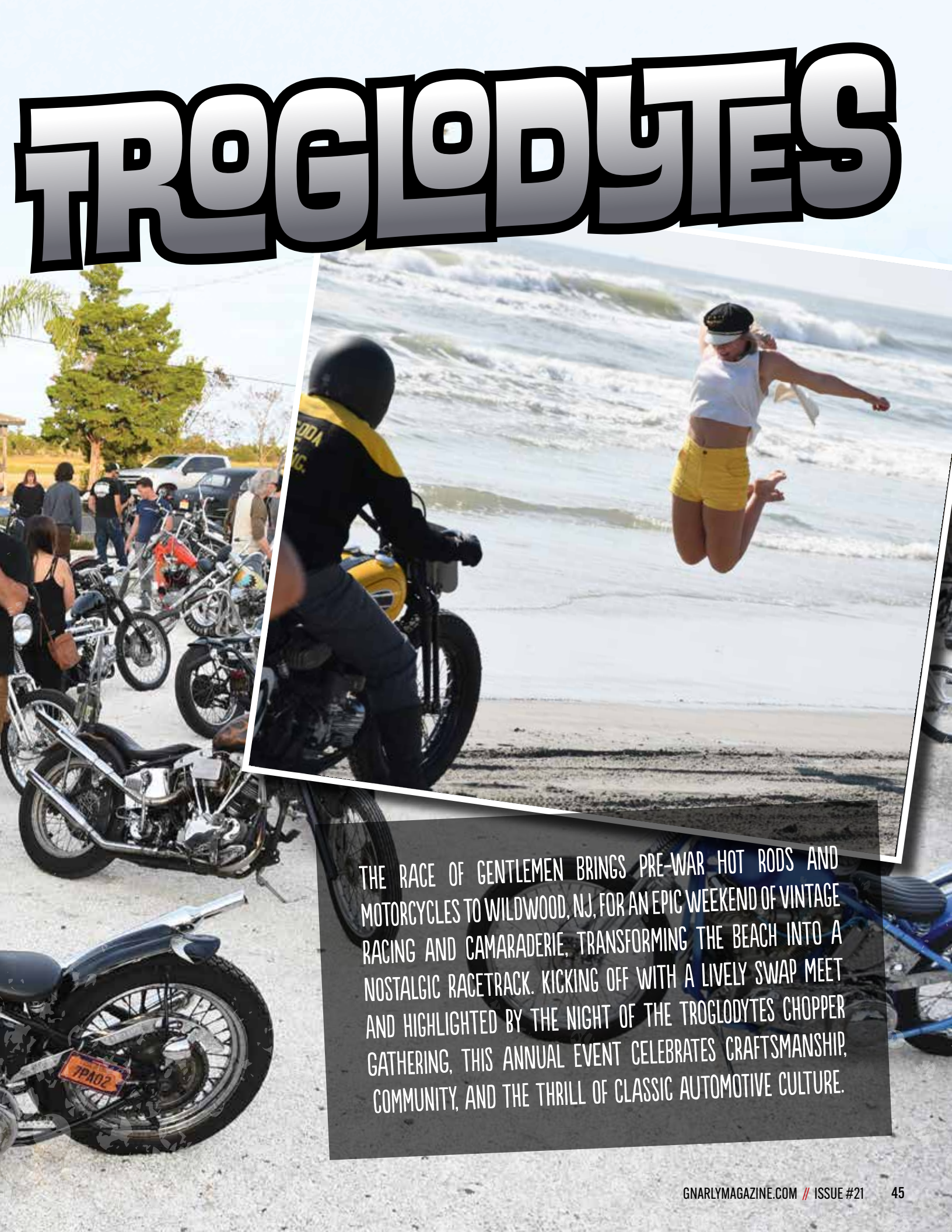

THE RACE OF GENTLEMEN BRINGS PRE-WAR HOT RODS AND MOTORCYCLES TO WILDWOOD, NJ, FOR AN EPIC WEEKEND OF VINTAGE RACING AND CAMARADERIE, TRANSFORMING THE BEACH INTO A NOSTALGIC RACETRACK. KICKING OFF WITH A LIVELY SWAP MEET AND HIGHLIGHTED BY THE NIGHT OF THE TROGLODYTES CHOPPER GATHERING, THIS ANNUAL EVENT CELEBRATES CRAFTSMANSHIP, COMMUNITY, AND THE THRILL OF CLASSIC AUTOMOTIVE CULTURE.

For over a decade, Mel Stultz has been bringing together some of the finest pre-war hot rods and motorcycles for epic beachside battles in Wildwood, New Jersey. This legendary event, now known worldwide as The Race of Gentlemen, transforms Wildwood's sands into a vintage racetrack each year. Enthusiasts from around the globe arrive with their prized cars and bikes to take part in this thrilling spectacle. There's nothing like the sight of motorcycles and hot rods, lined up in pairs, flag-started by vibrant ladies who leap into the air, sending these roaring machines down the sand.

The weekend kicks off with a swap meet and various other events, but it's the Night of the Troglodytes that truly starts the festivities.

Since The Race of Gentlemen's first year on Wildwood's shores, the Night of the Troglodytes has been a staple of Friday night, bringing together a stunning collection of custom choppers. Over time, it's become a fusion of chopper culture and custom car enthusiasts, with gatherings that spill into the streets around seaside hotels, sparking countless tales of wild antics and unforgettable scenes.

For 2024, the Night of the Troglodytes found a new home at Lazy Bass Bayside Bar & Grill in North Wildwood, NJ—a perfect setting with views of the bay and North Wildwood Bridge completing the backdrop. As the sun set, choppers of every era began rolling into the parking lot, each bike showcasing elaborate paint jobs and eye-popping artwork. This gathering has become a beloved way for fans to unite and set the stage for the weekend's beachside racing.

Between the food, drinks, and vibrant conversations, the Night of the Troglodytes is packed with stories and camaraderie, offering a rare blend of classic chopper spirit, custom car culture, and excitement for The Race of Gentlemen. This annual tradition is a celebration of craftsmanship, community, and the thrill of the ride.

Las Hop

FROM THE EAST COAST TO THE WEST COAST: UNITING KUSTOM KULTURE AND HARDCORE WITH

MIKE GALLO

BY JEFF ALEXANDER

SERVING AS **AGNOSTIC FRONT'S** BASSIST FOR OVER 20 YEARS, MIKE GALLO CONTINUES EMBRACING KUSTOM KULTURE TO SLOWLY BUILD A CAREER WITHIN MIXED MEDIA ARTS. LEVERAGING HIS PASSION FOR NEW YORK'S UNDERGROUND GRAFFITI WITH HIS IMMERSION INTO MOTO CULTURE, GALLO IS SLOWLY INTEGRATING HARDCORE AND KUSTOM KULTURE, FOLLOWING THE PATH ORIGINALLY CREATED BY MIKE NESS WHEN HE BLENDED SOCIAL DISTORTION WITH HOT ROD CULTURE.

"I admired Ness mixing hot rod culture with punk, two things that certainly did not coexist back in the day. Our singer Roger Miret has really been into hot rods and in New York, he formed a club, The Rumblers and it really opened my eyes to all the details in kustom kulture. Mike bringing hot rods to punk was a big and important thing because it blended two worlds," recalled Gallo.

Gallo shared anecdotes of growing up around underground artists and 'writers' within the burgeoning New York graffiti culture. The city was viewed as his playground and a canvas for artists but despite lacking formal artistic acumen, Gallo proudly believed his peers were on the cusp of creating a unique medium of self-expression. However, he stated city officials and communities were very resistant to underground art, criminalizing artists for their work. Today, graffiti and street art continues to permeate pop culture, in marked contrast to the once-criminalized artists whose work may fetch thousands within today's auction houses.

"It's wild to me how widely accepted graffiti, or 'street art' is today! Back then, we would run all over the city, using shoplifted cans of paint from Pergament and Jamesway. I admit, I liked the thrill of the criminal element but I felt there were some talented artists waiting to break out and it was cool to be part of that. I was always

into drawing, spray painting, and paint markers. I remember my dad shouting 'These mothafuckers are ruining the city with this stuff' and I was hiding my notebooks hoping he wouldn't see any of my art," laughed Gallo.

In addition to embracing New York's underground art community, Gallo quickly embraced New York's burgeoning DIY hardcore community, affirming he was immediately drawn to the positive messages and easy gateways toward creative expression. It wasn't until several years after joining Agnostic Front did Gallo revisit his passion for art, and finally create his own avenue to building a parallel career.

"My time is very limited being a father and the amount of touring we do. Agnostic Front just finished playing 21 shows in one month and sticking a bunch of older guys in a sprinter van can start to take a toll. I love the guys and love what we do! Look at Vinnie Stigma! He is pushing 70 and we still throw him in the pit and he loves it, which makes the long drives worth it. I got back into art as a means to still express my creativity during the little spare time I have. I work with epoxy, spray paint, and acrylic creating original pieces built on the style of early graffiti art. My friends kept asking me to create for them, and it really snowballed as word of mouth spread and then I began selling on my own webstore," laughed Gallo.

For Gallo, his recent embracing of kustom kulture has him view the subculture with fresher eyes in comparison to seasoned veterans that blazed the trail.

> "NO QUESTION GROWING UP NEW YORK WAS WILD, A LOT OF TIMES IT FELT LIKE THOSE CRIME MOVIES BUT IT ALSO REPRESENTED A LOT OF POSSIBILITIES."

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315
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AGNOSTIC FRONT
BLACK FLAG
MISFITS
RAMONES
The CLASH
BAD BRAINS
ZONE

Building off the foundation of graffiti artists whom he admired, like RISK and SEEN, Gallo blends familiar boldness of street art to subtly capture the spirit of hardcore and the dangerous streets of yesterday, often featured in classic crime and drama films that remain celebrated today with a well-deserved place within the lexicon of cinema.

"No question growing up New York was wild, a lot of times it felt like those crime movies but it also represented a lot of possibilities. As kids, we would view the city as ours, and a lot of ideas were thrown around. Seeing the work of artists like SEEN resonated with me, he's called the godfather of graffiti for a reason because he was so creative. When I look at kustom artists, the use of metal flake and pinstriping resonate with me," stated Gallo.

Hardcore resonated with Gallo as well and he considers his continued tenure with Agnostic Front an impacting experience. If graffiti and street artists captured the visuals of New York's gritty, urban landscape from yesteryear, AF originally provided the soundtrack. United Blood and Victim In Pain stand as templates for East Coast hardcore, serving as the foundation for the initial NYHC community. Miret penned lyrics centered on themes of injustice, police brutality, and how to transcend the idea of a limited future within the decaying urban structure that was once New York City. Agnostic Front earned acclaim and disdain, most notably from Maximum Rock & Roll, ultimately leading to several detractors claiming AF espoused fascist ideals, a cloud that hung above the group for several years.

"I take issue with people thinking we believe in anything oppressive or racist and it's disappointing that at times, people still question this. My wife is Jewish, my father is a Holocaust survivor and our singer is a Cuban immigrant. We are for equality and the band has always stood for that. I don't believe in any nonsense or fake tough guy stuff. I may have friends that can be tough, but personally, I don't and won't act that way. Hardcore has given me a good life and has made me a better person," stated Gallo.

He added, "We work to promote unity and on this tour, Roger urged people in the crowd to take a moment, look at each other and shake hands because this could lead to creating a lifelong friendship, sparked by attending a hardcore show. To me, that means so much because it shows what we are still working to do," shared Gallo.

For Gallo, kustom kulture espouses a parallel ideology to hardcore. DIY creation, promotion, and to celebrate the individual creativity of artists seeking to make some kind of impact on supporters while bringing people together.

"For me, I think kustom kulture and hardcore have some similarities. You work to communicate something using art and bring people together. Agnostic Front does the same thing onstage and I love how different our records can sound. Both hardcore and kustom kulture celebrate a passion and dedication to the craft. I love freehand drawing and creating work in graffiti style but I also want to work and put the time in to learn pinstriping and creating on this friggin' CNC routing machine I just bought," laughed Gallo.

"FOR ME, I THINK KUSTOM KULTURE AND HARDCORE HAVE SOME SIMILARITIES. YOU WORK TO COMMUNICATE SOMETHING USING ART AND BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER"

Gallo stated he wants to continue pushing himself within the new but challenging world of kustom kulture. He shared some artists have reached out to see if he could attend painting classes, to eventually add a new tool to the creative toolbox, reinforcing the sense of community that initially attracted him to hardcore music and art.

"Community will always be important to me. This recent tour with Obituary was great because it showed that we could take our music and expose a whole bunch of new people to what we've been doing. I think that pushes us and with my art, I want to continue pushing myself. We are currently working on new material, working with a new producer and it will still sound like AF but fresher. We love what we're doing, and the energy has been great. Roger has been cancer-free and we wanna keep doing this. I'm ready to learn and grow with my art and I'm so lucky to have the opportunity to do both," concluded Gallo.

GALLO-ORIGINALS.COM
INSTAGRAM: @MIKEGALLO1975
INSTAGRAM @AGNOSTICFRONTNYC

BRUSH STROKES AND BOLD COLORS

VICKY'S HANDPAINTED

Vicky Rhéaume, the creative force behind Vicky's Handpainted, hails from the picturesque province of Québec, Canada. With a passion for vibrant colors and a penchant for custom artwork, Vicky has been making waves in the artistic realm for the past five years. Specializing in personalized paintings, particularly on motorcycles, motorcycle helmets, and cars, she infuses each piece with her signature style inspired by the Kustom Kulture movement.

When Vicky embarks on a painting endeavor, her home studio transforms into a sanctuary of creativity. Surrounded by a mix of brushes, her preferred tool being the Mack Tidwell brush, and a palette of 1 Shot paints, she immerses herself in the process. The rhythmic beats of music serve as her muse, guiding her hand as she brings her visions to life on canvas.

Reflecting on her artistic journey, Vicky acknowledges the learning curves encountered when transitioning to enamels. Starting from scratch, she persevered through numerous setbacks, embracing patience and resilience as guiding virtues. Drawing inspiration from her childhood fascination with comic books, Vicky's artistic influences shaped her creative trajectory.

Despite her undeniable talent, Vicky remains humble, citing Pierre Tardif, a seasoned sign painter and mentor, as a source of admiration. Their friendship has provided invaluable guidance, reinforcing the importance of hard work and dedication in the pursuit of artistic excellence. Throughout her career, Vicky has experienced numerous highlights, from participating in prestigious events to collaborating with fellow artists. Balancing her passion with a part-time career as a hairdresser has afforded her financial stability while allowing her to select projects aligned with her artistic vision.

Navigating the ever-changing landscape of social media, Vicky recognizes its instrumental role in expanding her reach and attracting new clients. A testament to

this is the widespread acclaim garnered by her patina-adorned motorcycle, which captivated audiences worldwide and propelled her into the spotlight.

Despite her busy schedule, Vicky finds solace in rock climbing, a pursuit that provides both physical and mental rejuvenation. Looking ahead, she envisions a future filled with boundless creativity and exploration, where her artwork continues to evolve and inspire for years to come.

Whether painting from the comfort of her studio or embarking on new adventures, Vicky remains steadfast in her dedication to her craft. With each stroke of the brush, she leaves an indelible mark on the world, a testament to the enduring power of creativity and passion.

Instagram: @vickys_handpainted

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A SOJOURN INTO SURREALISM: MY PILGRIMAGE TO THE SHOW ME LOWBROW ART SHOW

WRITTEN BY MILES B. DYSON / PHOTOS TYLER MCDOWELL • IG: @BLACKMAGICKTV • YOUTUBE.COM/@BLACKMAGICKTV

In the heart of the American Midwest, where the soul of the land seems to hum with the dreams of a thousand restless spirits, I found myself on a pilgrimage. The destination: the Show Me Lowbrow Art Show in St. Louis, a veritable orgy of creative chaos at the historic Das Bevo venue. This was no ordinary journey. This was a descent into the underbelly of American art, where the lines between reality and imagination blur into one grotesque, glorious smear.

It began with the raw, primal need to escape the mundane. Kansas City, Kansas, my launching pad into the abyss, felt like a cage that Saturday afternoon. With a heart full of

anticipation and a stomach ready for rebellion, I headed eastward on the asphalt vein that connects the two cities. The sky was a dull gray canvas, mirroring the state of my mind—a perfect backdrop for the madness to come.

Arrival in St. Louis was marked by a necessary detour: Seedz Café. The air inside was thick with the scent of fresh, vibrant sustenance— a vegan haven in the meat-loving Midwest. The meal was a sensory explosion, a prelude to the artistic feast ahead. Each bite of my dinner was an affirmation of life's beauty, a contrast to the gritty spectacle that awaited at Das Bevo.

St. Louis at night is a city of shadows and whispers. My refuge was the humble abode of a mad genius—Dennis the Menace, a long-time comrade in the art of living on the edge. His home was a sanctuary of absurdity, walls adorned with relics of past adventures, each one a silent witness to the madness of our existence.

Dawn broke with the promise of anarchy. The sun crept over the horizon, casting an eerie glow on the city. Dennis and I set out for Das Bevo, a venue steeped in history, now repurposed as a temple for the worship of the bizarre and the beautiful. The Show Me Lowbrow Art Show was a beacon for artists from all corners of the United States, each one a disciple of the unconventional.

Walking into Das Bevo was like stepping into another dimension. The energy was electric, the air buzzing with anticipation. The walls dripped with the works of legends and newcomers alike.

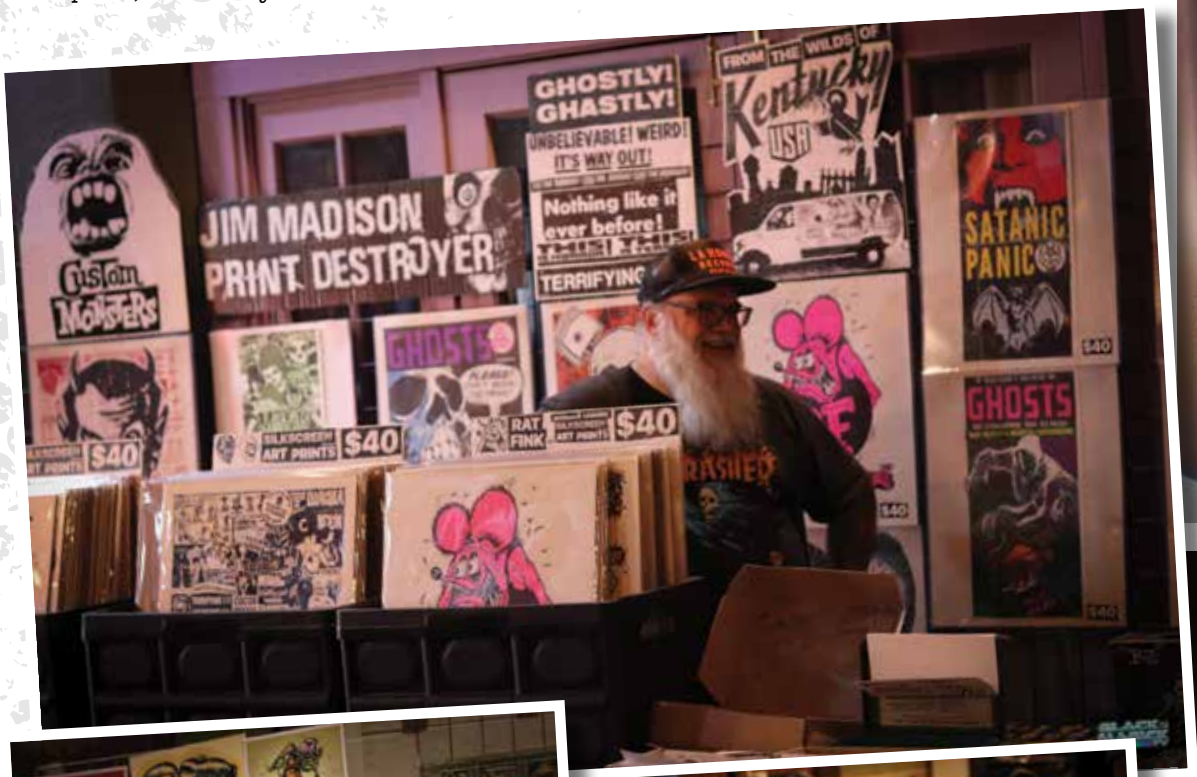
There was Lil Daddy Roth's traditional styling, Neko Lynn's surreal visions, and Jim Madison's dystopian delights. Hot Rod Jen's creations roared with the spirit of rebellion, while Logan Leeds's pieces danced on the edge of sanity. Guy Salazaar's works were a visceral punch to the gut, a reminder of the raw power of true artistic expression.

Every corner of the venue was a riot of color and form, each piece challenging the viewer to look beyond the surface. This was not art for the faint-hearted. It was a celebration of the weird, the wonderful, and the wicked. The Show Me Lowbrow Art Show was a testament to the enduring spirit of creativity that defies convention and laughs in the face of conformity.

As I wandered through the labyrinth of art, I felt a connection to something greater. Each piece was a fragment of the collective human experience, a snapshot of the world through the eyes of those brave enough to see it differently. The artists were not mere creators; they were visionaries, rebels, and prophets.

The day dissolved into a blur of conversations and connections. I spoke with artists and admirers alike, each one sharing their stories and their passions. There was no pretense here, no facade. This was raw, unfiltered humanity at its finest.

Leaving Das Bevo, I felt a sense of completeness that only comes from being in the presence of true art. The drive back to Kansas City was a silent one, the events of the day echoing in my mind. The Show Me Lowbrow Art Show had been more than just an exhibition; it was a journey into the heart of creativity, a celebration of the human spirit's unyielding desire to create, to express, and to defy.



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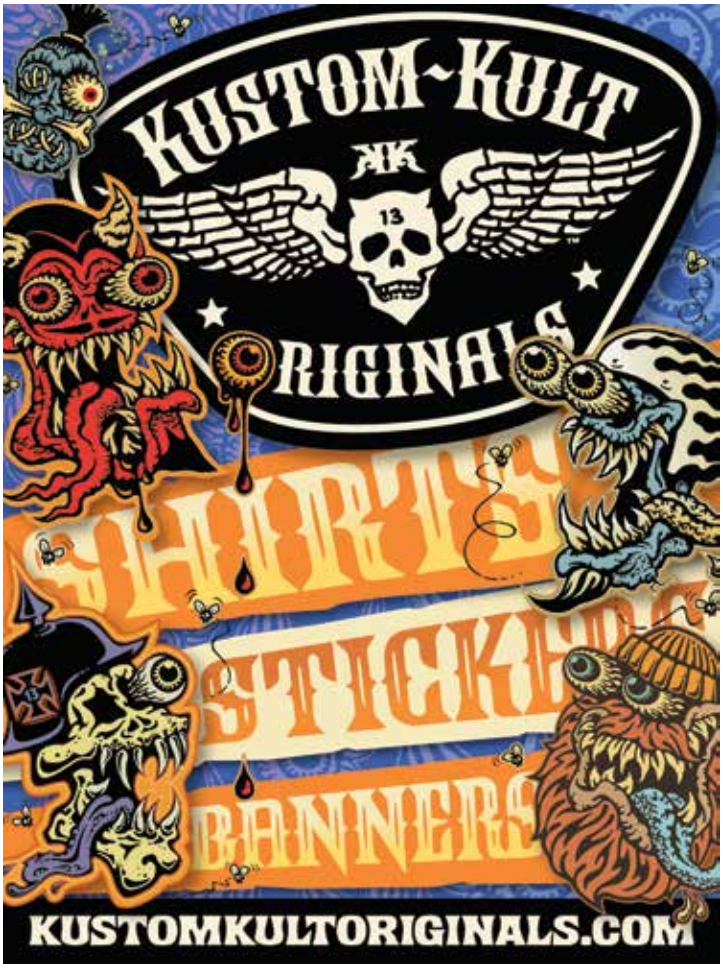
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